

44
106
p. 1

THE NEW ENGLAND
ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

ORGANIZED FEBRUARY 28, 1901

WILLIAM ALLAN NEILSON, PRESIDENT.

F. W. C. HERSEY, SEC'Y AND TREAS.

CHARLES SWAIN THOMAS, EDITOR

Editorial correspondence should be sent to the Editor at Newtonville, Mass.; business correspondence should be sent to the Secretary-Treasurer at 17 Lawrence Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

LEAFLET

SAMUEL F. HOLMES

MARCH

NO. 106

WORCESTER ACADEMY, WORCESTER, MASS.

1918

A GRAMMARIAN'S RESURRECTION

(With apologies to R. B.)

"I hold very strongly that the first step in intellectual training is to impress upon a boy's mind the idea of science, method, order, principle, and system; of rule and exception, of richness and harmony. This is commonly and excellently done by making him begin with grammar."

—CARDINAL NEWMAN.

There is no subject taught today in secondary schools which permits so much rambling as English. This lot is both blessed and accursed. Whatever the tongue of man may utter, *exceptis excipiendis*, is proper stuff somewhere in the English course. Thus we may find place for the thoughts of all minds on all subjects. Herein is blessed variety. By the same sign, we may saunter down the byroads of Anything to the hamlet of Nowhere. And this is confusion. Happily through such diversified country there lead broad highways, sightly and straight. To these we may always return from ramblings; by them we may journey through our rich demesne. One such trustworthy road is the study of English grammar. Whatever the goal, whether the gates of the college, or the open road of life, I hold that the straightest, smoothest route thither, is called, in its early reaches, grammar.

One of the most blessed periods in English teaching was the era which taught grammar and required memorizing of our literature's best prose and poetry in large quantities. One of our darkest epochs, from which—thanks to the powers—we appear to be emerging, has suppressed grammar either by edict or neglect, has qualified elegant youths to say in low guilty accents, "Breaths there the man with soul so dead," and attribute it to Lowell, has taught *impressions* and *extracts*, and has boasted of the wise man who enriched the

vocabulary of pedagogical psychology by more terms than any of his fellow criminals.

I believe English grammar should be taught in our schools from the lowest grades up through the high schools. I believe it has beneficent work to do for teachers and boys. I believe there is moral virtue to be imparted in its teaching, exactness in its usages, variety in the flexibility it sanctions and encourages, safer than any wayward individualistic departures from the fold of syntax and construction.

Our tongue needs constant attention; always there are influences that prowl and prowl around, marauding in English speech. There is too much destructive philosophy abroad nowadays. Let us conserve! I cannot agree with the teachers of English, eminent and respected, who defend such anarchy as this: "Who are you looking for?" Let them end their question with a preposition—it is frequently a forceful ending; but let them not lift a tool against one of the few remaining stones in the ruins of our inflections. I concede and support the preposition; let them support the objective ending. It belongs there. It is a sign of a true relation. Who are we to deny its birthright and disown it for bastard to our tongue? In truth, my lords and gentlemen, where shall we stop in such so-called reforms as this? The defendants say that "who," as written, is now nominative in the speaker's mind; therefore, the elided "m". Let them, then, teach this form, "Who is it you're looking for?"—and I am silent. But I spy them! It is the "m" that they are hounding, poor frail survivor of a species almost extinct. It is too much work to pronounce it. Very well. In the same spirit let us drop "Yours truly" from letters, and cease to lift our hats to ladies.

I am afraid of such teaching. I don't like its morals. Will it not approve, "Do like I did," or, "I felt like I should faint," or, "He is the one which I meant"? Was it not the Rev. Walter Skeat, so eminent in linguistics, who said that he thought the Cockney accent and dialect would prevail in England, because all languages tend to drop to the level of the most careless users? It is easy to create a defense for the thousand deteriorations that pass on the lips of the throng, and then make them a rule. But let us not. These forms will live unaided. Let us teach the best, not being ignorant of the colloquial.

For this and all failings in speech nothing is so healthful as a thorough drill in grammar. It teaches respect for all speech. If it be taught rightly and studied in various lan-

guages, it will even teach mastery of expression. Mr. James O. Fagan in his "Autobiography of an Individualist" attributes his fluency and mastery of words to his training in the classics. Mr. John Muir has told us in some of his recently published autobiographical chapters how severely he was trained in linguistics and mathematics. Such training helps to make staunch, good men—and "style is the man." Cardinal Newman's words at the beginning of this paper have it right.

But English grammar will do something for teachers as well as for boys. How unfair to handicap a teacher of a foreign tongue with all its own difficulties by the necessity of teaching the rudiments of English grammar in addition! Ask the next teacher you meet if ignorance of English grammar ever bothers him. Some of these instructors have told me of the time required to teach parts of speech, restrictive clauses, transitive verbs, and appositives, in English sentences before taking up the foreign principle. And that in the midst of a crowded year!

Yet there are good men who believe in this—good men, not wise men! I have heard one good and honorable headmaster defend the acquisition of English grammar from Latin grammar, regardless of the tiny size of the Latin squads in all schools or of the radical differences between the grammars of the two languages. The grammar of one tongue will always teach something about that of another tongue. But it never is identical, only analagous. Let English grammar be the handmaid in such work. By reference to and comparison with its constructions and syntax, illuminate the work of other teachers. Don't swindle the boy in two departments.

For the reason of such great possible correlation in language study, I hold that an English teacher ought to be familiar with Latin and French, or French and German, or with all three. To such a one opportunities are blessed and numerous.

This analogy between the grammars of different tongues is not a strange but a natural thing. It surprises school-boys. It does not surprise us, for we know, or ought to know, that all grammar is based on the laws of thinking, which are universal. Thus, the unit everywhere is the sentence. All sentences are formed by the same process. We perceive actually or intellectually the object of our thought which we term by an odd inversion the subject of our finished thought or sentence; we think or say something

about it—the act of predication. This second step may affect a third member, called the object, or it may not. It may be altered by reason of modified judgments, modifiers, or it may not. The thing is done—a sentence in whatever tongue. Invert, qualify, alter as we may, the *process* of conceiving a sentence is the same always. The study of grammar, then, is really a study of logical processes of thought and their results. Now our instruction in English ought to parallel the development of these thought processes. Step by step the child advances to the first sentences. There teaching can begin—teaching how to think; to convert declarative sentences into interrogative; to use simple phrases and so on, until finally complex sentences are produced. And this conclusion brings me to my last point,—the beneficent work which English grammar may do in helping the teaching of composition and in developing power to think.

At another opportunity I should like to return to this topic of a course of instruction, not in English alone, which shall parallel and stimulate the development of the thinking processes. I wonder if through investigation and criticism, we are not approaching a change in our manner of measuring what a pupil ought to know at any given period, and in the character of the knowledge that we teach. The Hillegas scale, Binet's experiments, a suggestion as to tests for measuring pupil's knowledge, in Prof. Mann's book, "The Teaching of Physics", a proposed investigation by the Department of Education of Harvard University to determine at what age certain forms and sentence structures may be expected to appear in children,—all these suggest the outlines of a great scheme of standard values in all branches by which pupils may be measured at proper intervals throughout their secondary days. And of course the determination and adoption of such a scale or system can come only after two things are clear: first, just what processes of thinking and expression may be considered normal at any given age; second and especially to the point, just what sort and amount of knowledge ought to be imparted during the whole period of education. The first is particularly a matter for psychologists. The second concerns every teacher and every individual that looks for joy and service through increased knowledge. That we are now measuring accurately what we have taught, or teaching what life really demands, are two absurdities that make us ridiculous when we support them.

But for the present, with this question of grammar teach-

ing in mind, let us look at the stage of development in English composition commonly found in our secondary schools.

Here pupils are having trouble with their sentences. 'Tis not alone flexibility they lack—these sentences; they lack unity, coherence, emphasis; they lack variety. What is the trouble? Simply ignorance of the processes of thinking and of sentences as tools for use;—that is, no applied knowledge of grammar. A great gulf is fixed between grammar as taught—if it is taught at all—in the earlier years and its application to oral and written expression. The pupils have learned a few definitions. But in their grammar lessons they never learned to notice how one form of expression might be changed to another and to practice such changes. If they had they would now possess variety themselves for any given thought. They learned the *com-* the kind of subordinate clauses but not to use these clauses themselves for any given thought. They learned the *com-* pound structure but not the method of using the compound sentence, and its difference from the complex form. All their sentences now are likely to be compound. Had they learned these things, not in one grade but gradually, they would now write sentences chosen to suit their thought.

The best of the latest textbooks in composition have done much in their treatment of the sentence to bridge this gap. They have made clear the relation between the grammatical form of the sentence—simple, complex, compound—and the elements of unity, coherence, and emphasis. And the sentence is just the point in composition where the battle is lost or won. Once get a boy to write good English sentences, varied, flexible, unified, coherent, emphatic, loose, periodic or balanced, at will—and you have freed his mental wings. "He can fly or he can run!" From there on the work is constructive; the corner stone is laid and the whole edifice may be reared on the mastered sentence.

Now such an achievement is a possible thing. It is possible for any teacher with a good knowledge of sentence structure to teach pupils a mastery of sentence writing that shall make those old goblins, lack of coherence, lack of unity, lack of emphasis, retire because business is poor. At the bottom of such instruction is a strong sense of the peculiar uses of the different grammatical forms, phrases, complex sentences, compound sentence. There must be a constant reference to grammatical terms, frequent grammatical questions in syntax or construction—even in literature teaching—, practice in converting phrases into clauses or words,

and vice versa, examination of loose or periodic sentences with reference to grammatical structure. Such work is the calisthenics of Composition. These things are never done in many schools. Grammar is not mentioned from September to June. It is not applied. The field of application is very wide, but I shall limit myself to one instance for specific illustration of my thesis that grammatical knowledge may be of great help in teaching to think.

I have found that most boys of my junior and senior classes, coming from other instruction, had no notion why sentences are complex or compound. All they knew about the two structures was their useless, because unused, definitions—"a complex sentence is a sentence which has one independent clause and one or more," etc.; "a compound sentence is one which has two or more coordinate clauses." Knowing no more than this, and even this dimly, they could not choose between the two sentences with any discrimination. Some pupils, of course, were better than others. These could think rightly and well. The others, innocent of any training in the use of logical sentence forms, had grown up unable to think with variety of power. They could not think two things or ideas in relation, making combinations, contrasts, or comparisons. I asked these boys to take a new conception of these sentence forms—to believe that the complex form was peculiarly suited for certain particular kinds of thought where no other form would do as well; that the compound form was the only instrument for expressing certain other forms of thought. Going a little farther in the latter case, we saw what these forms of thought were; sentences in which equal members combined in different ways to produce a greater thought, such as those consisting of two or more statements of equal value uniting on equal terms, one supporting or amplifying the other—the copulative type; those consisting of two opposing statements matched uncompromisingly against each other—the adversative type—and so on. It is not difficult to learn soon these types of thought which require the compound form. Examining complex sentences, we found that the sentence invariably qualified the statement with conditions, results, details of time, place, degree, all of which were added in a clause. Here, too, were easily found standard types of thought always requiring the complex form. Thereafter, the choice of sentence form in exercises was criticised: "Compound here?" or Complex better?" So the two structures came to be looked upon as tools, instruments of expression, instead of grammatical dummies.

In choosing which sentence form to use, the pupils could, I found, be guided very largely by the rules formed for securing unity, coherence, and emphasis. Conversely, when the thought of a sentence was properly accommodated by its form, the three elements were present. Of course this is no discovery; it merely suggests that it is possible to train boys in a sensitiveness to the forms of expression which shall guide them in the act of speaking or writing. Then laborious sentence correction in themes will lessen.

Let us see just for a moment how grammatical knowledge may help to secure unity, coherence, or emphasis. When I have taught this new conception of the sentence, and when the boys have become familiar with the two groups of connectives—easily the quickest method of teaching distinction between complex and compound sentences—I may find that a boy needs help. He has perhaps used a complex sentence where he should have used a compound sentence. By questions he is led to see that he has taken away from a combination one of its co-ordinate members, thus injuring its unity. Or if he has used a compound sentence, where he should have used a complex sentence, he is shown that he has created a false combination without real unity, since one of the members could not do the work of such grade. He has injured emphasis by failing to make his picture vivid enough. Indeed the very word “complex” may be made to suggest emphasis. And as for coherence, a good working knowledge of grammar makes play of it. “Reference of participles”—what is that to a mind familiar with participles as poor dependent blind beasts of burden, always getting into the wrong stall unless bridled properly and harnessed into their own shafts? For difficulties with pronouns the same treatment. And matters of uniform construction, with coördinate connectives, changes of subject, voice, mood, or tense—all these are simplicity to one who understands the grammatical terms employed, knows a subject from a predicate, a noun from a participle, or, one is tempted to add—“a hawk from a handsaw!” Emphasis, too, benefits. For it is first of all choosing the best possible instrument for expressing the thought—a simple sentence, perhaps, with phrases, a complex sentence indicating by its form an arrangement of ideas according to value, or a compound sentence presenting a composite picture. Familiarity with these forms makes choice simple but significant. Then emphasis asks, too, for the best internal arrangement. This is simple enough to the student who knows the normal order of a

sentence, sees an explanatory phrase to be of less value than some close modifiers, and so on. A sense of values leads to effective arrangement and saves multiplicity of words. An acquaintance with the possible forms at command will undoubtedly make one's sentences more varied. And it has been my experience that a boy with a strong sentence sense—that is, a feeling for the subject and predicate—writes inverted and periodic sentences freely.

But the greatest benefit to be gained from the study of grammar is better than correctness of speech, good as that is, better than well constructed sentences pleasing as they may be. When the teaching has presented grammar as a part of an organic system, gradually unfolded as the mind develops, made to help indeed in the development of that mind, the pupil will take the facts of grammar as true, not only in books but also in his daily speech. The knowledge and use of the means of expression will have been imparted together. He will know how to condense, expand, combine at will; he will be trained in complex and compound structures until he is accustomed to hold two ideas or things in relation, comparing or contrasting them. A half dozen of ways to say a thing will lie open to him, and he will know them and will choose from them. That means mastery of the instruments of expression. And such mastery means a quickened mind, that in the instant of speaking or of writing, reviews its possible instruments and selects therefrom. In the end the mind under such training will find itself used to judging, at home in making distinctions. This phase of constructive teaching of English grammar, with intent to develop power to think rapidly and discriminatingly, has been conspicuously absent in our training. A knowledge of grammar does not inevitably mean good taste. Knowledge of grammar will not take the place of intellect. It may teach how to think; it never teaches what to think. What a knowledge of grammar will do is to teach any boy how a sentence is constructed, how its parts are related; that is its first commonly understood duty. Better than that, however, it may teach a boy how to put sentences together—a constructive property not commonly attributed to this study. That is why I begin the senior and junior years, in which I have many new boys, by teaching a new conception of the sentence, for of the unquestionable value of grammatical knowledge as a continuous tonic, as a foundation upon which to teach composition, I stand deeply convinced. *Redeat ad pristinam gloriam!*

EDITORIAL NOTES

With this *Leaflet* we are enclosing the printed program of our spring meeting to be held at Huntington Hall, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, at 10 A. M. Saturday morning, March 15th. The general topic—*The Foreigner in our Schools*—is distinctly new, and we are confident that the speakers selected will offer many suggestions for the solution of a difficult problem. Miss Helen Louise Cohen, who is to make the closing address, comes to us highly recommended by Principal McAndrew of the Washington Irving High School of New York City. Since in this school over 85 per cent of the pupils are of foreign birth, it is obvious that the problem there has been acute. In their wise attempts to solve it the authorities have won an enviable reputation. Some of their methods we may be able to apply in our New England cities.

There is a growing demand throughout the country for the wiser training of teachers. Professor Greenough in the February number of *The English Journal*, has told of the experiment which Harvard University is making with a group of students who desire to teach English Composition. The State Board of Education in Massachusetts have been deeply interested in the problem, and have arranged to offer a course in the training of high school English teachers at the summer session of the Hyannis Normal School. These are but the beginning of a work which is sure of development within the immediate future. Deputy Commissioner William Orr is actively commanding the movement in New England.

One of the problems before the National Education Association is the making of a high-school syllabus. Over two hundred school and college men, under the general guidance of Mr. Clarence D. Kingsley of the Massachusetts State Board of Education, are at work in the various committees. The investigation which this group has made shows that the English teachers have made large and commanding advance within recent years and now have their work very definitely conceived.

It is not designed that the English syllabus now in process of construction shall be a hard and fast schedule; it is

proposed to make it so comprehensive and so flexible that its major motives may be applied to any particular English course in any particular school. Such an outline of aims and method and details should prove extremely helpful in advancing the general cause of English secondary teaching. Behind the movement are such authoritative organizations as the English Round Table of the National Education Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements in English.

RECENT ENGLISH BOOKS

Studies in Literature by Frederick M. Tisdell, Ph. D., Associate Professor of English in the University of Missouri. The Macmillan Company. Professor Tisdell's book is an elaborate treatment of the literary type commonly studied in the high school. These types, as named by him, are the epic, the romance and the novel, the drama, the essay, the public address, and narrative and lyric poetry. The latter part of the book discusses the important literary periods in English literature.

Social Forces in Modern Literature by Philo M. Buck, Jr., Professor of Rhetoric in the University of Nebraska. Ginn and Company. Price \$1.00. The table of contents reveals its plan and motive.

Chapter I. The Modern Element—a summary of the leading ideas in European literature from the Renaissance to the Revolution, showing the gradual emergence of the interest in the modern problem.

Chapter II. Montesquieu—the intellectual revolution in France.

Chapter III. Rousseau—the emotional revolution in France.

Chapter IV. Lessing—the intellectual revolution in Germany.

Chapter V. Wordsworth—the beginnings of romanticism in England.

Chapter VI. The Younger Goethe—the emotional revolution in Germany.

Chapter VII. The Elder Goethe—an aristocracy of culture.

Chapter VIII. Shelley—the empire of beauty, or the æsthetic ideal.

Carlyle's Essay on Burns, edited by Sophie C. Hart, Professor of English Literature in Wellesley College. English Reading for Schools. Henry Holt and Company.

Tennyson's Idylls of the King, edited by John Erskine, Associate Professor of English, Columbia University. English Readings for Schools. Henry Holt and Company.

For College Entrance Work

Old Testament Stories **374 Pages 45c**

Edited by JAMES R. RUTLAND, *Assistant Professor of English, Alabama Polytechnic Institute*

This edition gives the chief episodes from Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Daniel, with practically all of the Books of Esther and Ruth. There is a most helpful Historical Introduction and also a glossary.

King Henry the Fifth **136 Pages 30c**

Edited by EDGAR COIT MORRIS, *Syracuse University*

The rare illustrations which the author has succeeded in obtaining for this book add greatly to the pupil's interest in the play. The editing has simplicity, clearness and a live, vigorous quality that insures the appeal of the play to the pupil.

SILVER BURDETT & COMPANY

Boston

New York

Chicago

San Francisco



A Two Years' Course in English Composition



By Charles Lane Hanson, Mechanic Arts High School, Boston.

The author's well-known English Composition is generally considered a first-year book.

The present **Two Years' Course in English Composition** provides abundant material for the first and second year of any high school.

This new work features the practical, human, and cultural value of composition.

Fresh and numerous exercises give precise drill in construction and criticism, while stimulating models encourage appreciation of great writers.

It insures originality.

It facilitates class-room work.

It is essentially teachable.



GINN AND COMPANY, Publishers
29 Beacon Street, Boston



Just Published

Representative Essays in Modern Thought—A Basis for Composition

Edited by **Harrison Ross Steeves, A. M.**, Instructor in English, Columbia University, and **Frank Humphrey Ristine, Ph. D.**, Acting Professor of English Literature, Hamilton College, sometime Instructor in Columbia University.

Price, \$1.50.

This volume includes nineteen well written, intelligible, and authoritative essays by leading authors upon subjects which grip the intelligent interest of the average college freshman. Each essay is preceded by a brief introduction dealing with the author and his point of view. In most cases where there are two sides to the problem that has been presented, two typical essays, showing both points of view, are offered. According to this plan, one selection is assigned for reading each week, followed by the writing of impromptu themes in the classroom upon topics which suggest the salient points of the work under consideration. Every effort is made to encourage the student to think for himself.

AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

New York

Cincinnati

Chicago